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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6767  
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS  
RUEHJA/ISLAMIC CONFERENCE COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1415  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0997  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1915  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RHHJJPI/USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 002967

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, NEA, NEA/IPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/23/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV KISL ID XF

SUBJECT: MAINSTREAM MUSLIM ORGANIZATIONS PRESS FOR  
INFLUENCE ON MIDDLE EAST POLICY

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Indonesia's two largest mass Muslim organizations--Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah--have recently publicly criticized U.S. policy in the Middle East. In addition to the ritualistic criticism of the USG, the statements--made in advance of Palestinian leader Abbas, visit to Jakarta this week (see septel)--reflect efforts by these influential organizations to play a larger role in shaping Indonesia's response to global Muslim issues. In private, NU and Muhammadiyah leaders have ratcheted down the rhetoric and expressed tentative support for a proposed U.S.-hosted peace conference later this year. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) SHARP CRITICISM OF USG: In press statements last week, Indonesia's two largest mass Muslim organizations, NU and Muhammadiyah, expressed doubts about U.S. Middle East policy and the USG's "credibility" as an honest broker re the Palestinian issue. NU central executive board chief Said Agil Siradi publicly asserted that "when every country condemns Israel's violations and attacks, the US is the only country that defends Israel or abstains." A member of Muhammadiyah's Central Executive Board, described U.S. support for peace in the Middle East as "sheer camouflage" and criticized the U.S. for creating a "democracy double standard" by refusing to recognize Hamas's "victory" in general elections.

¶3. (C) In private discussions, however, both NU and Muhammadiyah officials have expressed support for U.S. efforts. Raja Juli Antoni, Executive Director of the Ma'arif Institute and a member of Muhammadiyah's International Relations Committee, told us that Muhammadiyah strongly supports the idea of a U.S.-hosted peace conference later this year and believes that Indonesia ought to attend.

(Note: During his recent visit, Abbas repeatedly asserted that Indonesia would be invited to any conference that takes place -- see septel.) He stated that Indonesia can play a role by bridging the Hamas/Fatah divide and strengthening moderates on both sides. Rozy Munir, a top NU leader and the next Indonesian ambassador to Qatar, recently told Pol/C that the U.S. "has the influence to make all sides work together" and it is positive that it is "using those levers now."

¶4. (C) THE SEARCH FOR RELEVANCY: In addition to the latest public comments, the two organizations have in recent months sought to expand their role on international Muslim-related

issues. For example in September, NU took steps to try to help secure the release of Korean hostages in Afghanistan. NU and Muhammadiyah leaders, efforts to bridge the Sunni-Shi'a sectarian divide, especially in Iraq, failed to generate much enthusiasm following an international conference hosted in Bogor in April 2007, however. In October 23 discussions with poloffs, The Asia Foundation's Director for Islam and Development, John Brownlee, described the anti-U.S. rhetoric and the interest in serving as a "neutral" arbiter of international Muslim issues as a tactic in NU and Muhammadiyah's search for relevancy in public life. He claimed that both organizations have links and influence at all levels of government, but institutionally they appear rudderless. As a result, efforts to influence foreign policy are driven primarily by "personality politics" of their respective chairmen, Hasyim Muzadi and Din Syamsuddin.

¶5. (C) Contacts within Muhammadiyah, however, expressed skepticism that either NU or Muhammadiyah are positioned to contribute in any concrete way--negative or positive--to the Middle East Peace Process. In the past, Muhammadiyah's leaders such as Lukman Harun maintained a close relationship with PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, whereas Syamsuddin has yet to demonstrate he has the same strength of ties to the region. Ironically, while Syamsuddin looks for every opportunity he can to boost his personal political stature, his followers are urged to keep out of politics. As a result Muhammadiyah's core focus is increasingly inward, despite a decision taken by its central board in 2005 to devote more resources to international relations. Within the organization, there is no priority placed on any specific Middle Eastern issue. Its international relations board lacks area specialists and shifts attention from one topic to

JAKARTA 00002967 002 OF 002

another on an ad hoc basis.

¶6. (C) GOI KEEPS CLOSE LINKS: The government for its part is eager to at least bring religious leaders into consultations on foreign policy. Foreign Minister Wirajuda on October 23 facilitated a meeting between 28 religious leaders--including NU and Muhammadiyah--and Abbas. Moreover, many members of the Indonesian government are members of either of the two organizations or have family friends who are. Given those type of ties, the organizations--NU with over 35 million members--and--Muhammadiyah with around 30 million--are bound to remain influential, including in the realm of Indonesia's foreign policy.

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